

The Search for Authentic Happiness

Avinash Desousa¹

¹*Consultant Psychiatrist and Founder Trustee, Desousa Foundation, Mumbai.
E-mail – avinashdes888@gmail.com*

How often have you come home from work complaining of a severe backache or a throbbing headache ? How often have you felt like throwing everything out of the window and going to a quiet calm place to gain some peace ? How many times have you felt sorry about various things that you have done at the spur of the moment that causes remorse and regret later ? The cause of this is unknown to you and a large number of visits to various doctors have failed to alleviate your problems. It is none other than STRESS – the hidden adversary. Stress is indeed a funny emotion. It is not even an emotion but rather a universal phenomenon that is ever increasing on an alarming scale. Stress is universal and seen worldwide affecting people in various ways and attacking all humans irrespective of size, shape, race and colour. Stress starts right before birth when the baby starts moving in the womb and remains with us faithfully till we reach our tomb. The aim of this article is not teach you about the rights and wrongs of life but rather to tell you about how we let stress and stressors influence our life in more ways than one. Let us now embark on a trip that shows us how stress affects us in every phase of life.

The infant

Right from birth, the infant has a lot of stresses to undergo. He is born into a large world from the dark monotony of the womb not knowing what to expect. For the first few years of his life he has to face the stress of survival. There is nothing that he can accomplish on his own. He is dependent in entirety on his guardian or his mother for his food and living. This period is equally stressful for the mother as she has to battle on one side with her household chores, her workload and her duties as an Indian wife while on the other side her baby yearns for her. Failure in either duty is faced by condemnation by various elders and superiors and thus stress begins. Stress equally affects the child at this stage when he finds that his meals are time bound. He cannot demand and achieve fulfillment. He learns to cope with his stress by smiling and sleeping for most of the day. Remember laughter and smiles kill stress. All the stress faced by a mother is nullified by one sweet smile from her baby and the baby in turn feels secure with one good hug from the mother. As the baby grows and is now walking about the place he faces another form of stress as he slowly is now taught to adjust to the norms of society. The art of toilet training is equally strenuous for both the parent and the child. The baby like all of us is possessive of what is his and refuses to part with his goods. The mother and father at this stage find this refusal hard to accept and enforce martial law on the child. So the battle of the chamber pot goes on and the finally the baby yields causing immense relief to the parent. Bringing up children is by no means an easy task and is in fact a challenge that has to be met. It is very important that in life we make heroes of our children and praise them regularly for all their good efforts however trivial they may be. Parents are

advised to stoop down to the level of their children's mental accumen and to think and be like them when dealing with them. Be your child's best friend. There is nothing as solid in Indian culture as the parent-child relationship. There may be pitfalls, fights and disagreements but it is the job of the parent to make the relationship one to last for ages. Remember, blood is always thicker than water and in the end blood prevails.

The school going child

The child going to school is faced by the daunting task of staying away from his parents for a period of some hours which had never occurred all this time in his life. He was always the apple of their eye and never had they separated him from their enclosure. He now not only has to move out to a new place but is with a large number of other children of his kind but under a new dictator or guardian as he may feel – his teacher. It is indeed a stress for both the parents who have to set themselves as per the child's timings and pull themselves out of bed early so that he is not late for school. The child may cry or refuse to go to school. It is very important to instill a sense of security in our children that we are always there for them and this is not a means to separate them. The simple way in which this can be done is to make sure that we accompany them to school and pick them up till they are accustomed to the place. The separation at times may be at times tough for an over protective parent and may cause stress in them. One must always remember that do not bleed when not needed for your children. Make them tough and able to handle life slowly right from an early age. Once your child comes back from school discuss his day at school using the words he uses and showing him how interested you are in his activity. Show him how proud you are of the fact that he goes to school and always teach him to respect his teachers. The child often imitates what is taught at home. Thus at home be a friend, guide and philosopher to your child and build a string bond that will surely pay dividends in the years to come. Once you leave the office switch off and enter a new world when you come home. Play with your children, every single day. It relieves your stress and also makes them happy. They feel secure and free with you. Learn to be a child and go down to their level. Do not try to change them to suit your needs, rather engage them and adapt yourself. Remember that all children are not the same. Never compare the growth of your children, physical or academic with others. If your child may not study or may be as brilliant as others do not rebuke them by offering comparisons of his peers or the neighbour's child. Comparison breeds insecurity in any walk of life and makes the child feel that he is not liked. Talk to your children and try to find out in their own language the cause of their problems. Very often some children are slow learners while others though average in studies may be good in sports or in art or music. It is very important that we cultivate in our kids the talents that they have. It helps them to grow emotionally. While all this is happening there are a large number of examinations that are faced by the child in school. Each coming examination is like a stress for the parent and he has to see that he is child is adept and ready to face the challenge. Never feel the stress about your child's examination. You may very often find that you are spending sleepless nights while your child is happily tucked up in his bed.

The college student

This is indeed a very important phase in our lives that we have all gone through. In college the first problem that we phase after a rather gruelling school career where we were chained and restricted is unlimited freedom. We are own masters and there is no

time bar and no one dominating us as we had in school. For many people approaching college is a daunting task as coming from orthodox families and unisex schools, we never see so many members of the opposite sex under one roof and here we are in one class and may even have to deal and interact with them. At this stage it is important to realize that never bother what others are thinking about you. They are often too busy worrying what you are thinking about them. Remember that you are what you are so be it. At this point many of us get carried away with a number of vices that come our way. Keep your mind uncluttered and decongested. Then these too shall pass our way keeping us unaltered. Parents are advised not to take the stress of their sons and daughters in college. Give them the freedom that they need and the space they require. You may not like their mixing with some friends. Instead of yelling and ordering them to close the association, call upon your children, sit and talk to them telling them your views, understanding theirs and reaching a common agreement. Always speak to your children about their careers and what they desire to do in life. Never enforce your career upon them. If they want to take up your career make sure that it is the career of their choice and that they are not doing it just to please you or assure themselves of a financial backing. Remember that if you want happiness for a lifetime, learn to love what you do. Tell your children that each man is an architect of his own fate, hence they should mould their careers and their lives as they wish and that you are always there to guide them. This not only reduces stress but also brings about a healthy understanding between you and your children. Whenever anything may go wrong teach your children to be truthful. Always tell the truth and face the music. You will have stress for a few minutes but the sharper the storm the sooner it is over. Never try to remote control your children. Studies are important, but so is pleasure derived in what you do. Everyone likes to do what he likes and not what he should be doing. As for all the collegians, all I can say is that realize that all you have today is due to a sincere effort put in by your parents. Remember that they may have views that are not compatible with yours as they have been brought up in a different generation. Nevertheless respect their views as they have something that you can gain only in time i.e. the experience of going through life. You cannot change them. Try and change yourself first. Remember whether in college or at work there is no overnight success. Behind every success there are twenty years of creativity and enthusiasm.

Stress at the workplace

Once college life ends most of us get in the groove of either setting up our own business or working as a professional, self employed or for a company. It is here that stress attacks us all the more as we have the responsibility of earning on our heads. Although cash may be trash and may be the dirtiest thing to handle as it goes through many unwashed hands it does give you a sense of security and relieves stress. It is at work that we have to perform well, show our talents, meet deadlines and ensure profits to maintain our position in the company. Well here too much of a burden on a weak horse can cause the animal to totter and fall down. Learn to switch off when you leave work as carrying work tension at home serves only to augment stress. Remember, never fall in love with your company. Behave as though you can be fired each day so that you can fire the company each day. It is a reciprocal arrangement. Learn to respect the opinion of others and always be open to criticism. The two main causes of stress in today's world are greed and our huge self esteem. We do not wish to bow even though we may be wrong. A quick sorry always relieves stress faster than a letter of apology written later remembering the incident when it can be forgotten at short notice. Always

be thankful and pay others compliments when needed. It helps and projects you as a better person in the company. The sweetest thing anyone can hear in any language is his own name. Try and remember the names of all the people you work with as well people whom you deal. Calling them by their first name always adds that personal touch at the workplace. The largest fires in the world can be prevented by a glass of water poured at the right moment. Never get angry with your subordinates for mistakes made. It adds to your stress. For every minute you are angry you lose sixty seconds of happiness. Do not remember a small fault and never forget a small act of kindness. Before you shout always be aware of the consequences that it may have on you and your position at work. To care of all stresses ensure that you are seen in your industry. Your competitors of today may be your partners or bosses tomorrow. Do not forget that anyone can be nice to a king but a man of focus can be nice even to a waiter. Always aim high at work so that you shall reach somewhere below it. When you reach for the stars you may not get one but shall not come up with a handful of mud either. Remember the saying 'If you can dream it then you can do it'. Learn to accept obstacles at every turn and come over them. Never lose hope and have faith in yourself. The most important way to solve any problem is to begin. You do not need to maintain rigid schedules or dairies. Be sure of what is your day ahead. Rise each morning fresh with the zest to face life to the fullest wanting to meet the new day with a radiant smile on your face. The difference between man and animals is man's huge ability to think. While we have a large number of jobs to do there are times like when we bathe and when we shave that can be used to plan out our day ahead. It reduces a lot of stress that may ensue later. In life nothing is permanent. Karma is not an ever enduring chain. What is done today can always be undone tomorrow.

Stress in marriage

The major complain that most people have is that with stress at work they have a family life that is absolutely hay wire and a wife that is nagging and dominating them all the time. The wife when asked for her story complains of the lack of interest shown by the husband towards her and the children in general. At the outset I would like to state that although our job and work feeds us it is a bond that is built with our children and family that remains lifelong. The human mind is always darkened with ignorance in this regard. Everybody can be great. It is important to be great in the eyes of people that matter to us rather than bothering about the people outside our homes who never really mean much to us. The key to a good marriage is two stable minds and an understanding built between them. Both you and your wife may be working but remember small tokens to show you care about each other go a long way in life. Call up your wife if possible once or twice from work and do tell her about your day. This if not possible can also be done by talking about your day and sharing your experiences with her each evening. Always never do all the talking but also be a good listener. You can show you care by just asking each other every morning if there is anything that you can do for each other during the day. Always help each other to grow and be proud of what you both do for a living. Be equally interested in your children and their development. This may also help to reduce a lot of stress at the workplace as the feeling of strong emotional security behind you always relaxes a fragile mind. As time passes our needs increase but there is only one method to tackle stress caused by it i.e. either we learn to live with what we have and diminish our needs or augment the means of income. Man spends twenty five years of life sleeping and when eliminate various activities man has only 7 years for rest and recreation in an average Indian life span of 65 years. Learn to relax in each others

company and in the company of your children. Never be greedy about money in life. It comes and goes. Never make hasty decisions. Consider all the implications before deciding on any major decision together. Life itself is a big menu. When life offers its goodies pick up a few and pass on the rest. In life quality matters and not quantity. Remember the riches that are in the heart can never be stolen. The grand essentials in life are something to do, something to love and something to hope for.

Stress in old age

As old age sets in it brings with it a feeling of insecurity. Although financially one may be secure there are various factors that affect the old. The children are often married and staying elsewhere and their grandchildren are staying away from them. Their house that was once abuzz with the hustle and bustle of life is now like an empty nest. For the ignorant old age is winter and for the learned it is harvest. Remember that the old people are the pride of our society. Although one may feel that they are outdated, they have experience in life that can benefit youngsters and their own children in any walk of life. Our parents have worked to achieve what we are today. Let us not disappoint them when they need our care. As I mentioned earlier children imitate their parents. If you ridicule your parents and elders or make them stay away, it may well be your turn tomorrow. Let your children have the advantage of your parents and their values. Let your parents relive their lives in your children. Be happy and take care of them till the end of their days. Their presence never breaks a family but rather completes it.

What I have mentioned above is not what many may think is stress management, but to me it is. Stress like charity starts within us and then goes on to become a permanent attitude. Exercise, diets are all part and parcel of a stress management program but along with that there is a general personal attitude reformation and growth of the mind that is the most important. With stress there are physical problems and so are psychological ones. There is only one person who can prevent the development of stress related problems in you. It is you and you alone who can do that. Your mind and your heart are your best assets. Preserve and take care of them. Reform yourself and you shall find a new meaning to life. Maintain an intact self.

Your kindness may be treated as your weakness

STILL BE KIND

Your help to others may go unheeded and unnoticed

STILL BE HELPFUL

Success shall win you false friends and true enemies

STILL STRIVE TO SUCCEED

Honesty and frankness shall make you vulnerable

STILL BE FRANK AND HONEST

The good you do today may be forgotten tomorrow

STILL DO GOOD

Your forthrightness may be treated as high headedness

STILL BE FORTHRIGHT

Virtues and values in life may mean little in today's world

STILL BE VIRTUOUS

Your faith in God and love for humanity may be taken up for orthodoxy and foolishness

STILL HAVE FAITH IN GOD

LOVE FELLOW HUMAN BEINGS